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Race to the Top

08.24.2010 | Campus and Community, Education, Students  The Dayton Early College Academy will receive critical financial support as part of a $400 million federal grant awarded today to the state of Ohio by the U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top program.

A total of $3.5 million of the award is allocated during the next four years to support Ohio's nine early college high schools and provide funding to open an additional six early colleges. The award is a significant victory for early colleges, which saw their funding reduced in the state's biennial budget last year.

"We see this as an affirmation that the early college model works," said DECA principal Judy Hennessey. "We are preparing traditionally under-represented students to enter and succeed in college. With this funding and expansion, this as an opportunity for early colleges to become institutionalized as part of Ohio's educational delivery system."

The University of Dayton founded DECA in 2003 in partnership with Dayton Public Schools. It was the first early college high school in Ohio and is the only charter school in the nation operated by a Catholic university.

DECA focuses on preparing low-income, urban students for college work through personalized academic attention; the development of close relationships between teachers, families and students; rigorous academic work; and introducing students to college classes at the University of Dayton and Sinclair Community College while still in high school.

"The funds provided through Race to the Top should provide sufficient financial support to stabilize the schools for the next couple years," said Thomas J. Lasley II, executive director of EDvention and chair of the Ohio Early College Association. "Race to the Top is an important financial bridge, but sustainable funding is still needed."

Both Lasley and Hennessey said they are optimistic the work of the state's School Funding Panel — which is about to offer funding recommendations regarding early colleges — will result in a funding model Ohio's early colleges require in order to function effectively and long term.

The Ohio Department of Education submitted the Round 2 Race to the Top application in June. In total, more than 538 Local Education Agencies, representing more than 60 percent, or about 1 million, of Ohio's school children, agreed to participate directly in Ohio's Race to the Top activities. Ohio was selected as a finalist in late July and a team from Ohio made a presentation and answered questions from U.S. Department of Education reviewers earlier this month.

The U.S. Department of Education provided prescriptive guidance in terms of centering the reform work on four specific areas: standards and assessments; data systems to support instruction; great teachers and leaders; and turning around the lowest-achieving schools.

The funds will be used to support Race to the Top activities either directly through Ohio schools districts or through state-supported initiatives. The Ohio Department of Education will begin working with each entity on its implementation plan. Plans must be submitted by November.

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